Women In Alberta

Alberta
WOMEN'S SECRETARIAT

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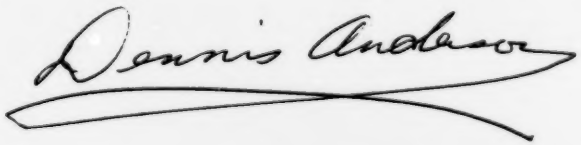
MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

The rapid changes of the last few decades have profoundly affected the lives of Alberta women. Increasing urbanization, industrialization and technological development, as well as progress in medical and scientific research, have altered the way we live.

Historically, Alberta was first in a number of significant areas affecting women. We were the first province to elect a woman to the Legislative Assembly, the first to appoint a woman judge and one of the first to appoint a woman to Cabinet.

Since 1971, the Alberta Government has introduced a number of significant initiatives to promote the position of women. This booklet, **Women in Alberta**, provides highlights of some of the present programs, activities and developments which are of special significance to Alberta women. Together they illustrate the government's commitment to ensure that women have the opportunity for full and equal participation in all aspects of the life of the province.

While it is evident that much progress has been made, other steps are yet to be taken. Future initiatives in the areas of education and training, employment, health, social services and participation in public life will further advance the position of Alberta women. Only by encouraging the abilities and talents of all women and men will Alberta maintain and enhance its prosperity.



Dennis Anderson
Minister Responsible
for Women's Issues

WOMEN IN ALBERTA: HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

Women have played a vital role in the history of Alberta. From the days of nomadic tribes, through the fur trade, and the eventual settlement of the province, efforts and accomplishments have been substantial.

The achievements of groups such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the United Farm Women of Alberta and the Local Councils of Women brought significant improvements to the living and working conditions in western Canada. These women's groups were instrumental in obtaining the vote for Alberta women in 1916.

One of the most significant political victories for women in Alberta was the 1929 "Persons Case", which officially recognized women as "persons", thereby granting them the right to become members of the Canadian Senate. This largely came about through the efforts of five Alberta women — Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Henrietta Edwards, Irene Parlby and Louise McKinney. Their victory was an important milestone in the attainment of women's rights and their legacy can be felt today.

WOMEN IN ALBERTA: GOVERNING STRUCTURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Over the years, the Government of Alberta has established various structures and assigned particular responsibilities to promote the participation of women in all aspects of society.

Minister Responsible for Women's Issues

The Cabinet post of Minister Responsible for the Status of Women (now called Minister Responsible for Women's Issues) was first created in 1979. The Minister, who also holds another Cabinet portfolio, has responsibility within the Cabinet for coordinating government policy on women's issues. As well, the Minister provides a focal point for those interested in addressing such issues. The Minister also represents Alberta at the federal-provincial level, meeting regularly with colleagues from across Canada to review issues of mutual concern.

Alberta Women's Secretariat

The Alberta Women's Secretariat was created in April 1984 as the central coordinating structure within the Government of Alberta to address the wide range of issues which have an impact upon women in the province. The Secretariat was preceded by the Alberta Women's Bureau, an information and referral office first established in 1928. Reporting directly to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, the Women's Secretariat analyses legislation, conducts research and promotes public awareness regarding issues of concern to women. The Women's Secretariat was formally established by legislation with the passage of the **Women's Secretariat Act** in September, 1986.

Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues

The Advisory Council on Women's Issues, established by legislation in 1986, is a separate citizen's advisory body consisting of fifteen members representing all regions of the province. Its mandate is to identify specific

matters relating to women and to make recommendations to the government through the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues.

Women's Program, Personnel Administration Office

In 1977, the Women's Program of the Personnel Administration Office was created to provide measures to assist female employees in achieving their career potential in the Alberta Public Service. It is designed to give women greater access to career development opportunities, to help managers meet their responsibility for developing all human resources, and to assist men and women to better understand and adapt to their changing roles in today's workforce.

Alberta Human Rights Commission

The Alberta Human Rights Commission, established in 1973, administers the **Individual's Rights Protection Act**. The Commission is responsible for increasing public awareness of human rights and for investigating and resolving complaints of discrimination. The Commission's guiding principle is that every person is equal in dignity and rights without regard to race, religious beliefs, colour, sex, physical disability, age, ancestry or place of origin.

WOMEN IN ALBERTA: NOW

In the last few decades, the rising labour force participation rate of women, the increasing numbers of women seeking higher education, as well as other social and demographic trends, have progressively changed the role of women in our province. The Government of Alberta has responded to this changing role by introducing policies, programs and legislation to address issues of particular importance to women. Below are highlights of some of the Government of Alberta's initiatives for women.

Women and the Family

Recent trends, such as a declining birth rate, a rising divorce rate, an increase in the number of single parent families and a parallel rise in women's labour force participation, have all had an impact on family life in Alberta.

In recognition of this changing family environment, the Government of Alberta has introduced a number of initiatives which are of significant benefit to women.

Initiatives

- The Government of Alberta has demonstrated its commitment to **child care** by providing the most accessible and affordable child care services in the country.
- The **Matrimonial Property Act** ensures the fair and equitable division of property between spouses in the event of divorce.
- The **Maintenance Enforcement Act** ensures that all who are entitled to court-ordered maintenance receive payments regularly.
- **Home Economics information and education** is offered by Alberta Agriculture to assist rural women and rural women's organizations.

- **Out-of-school care, family life education** and **parent education** are offered by municipalities through support from Family and Community Support Services, Alberta Community and Occupational Health.
- **Consumer programs** of particular interest to women, on such topics as financial management and consumer awareness, are offered through Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

Women and Education

In recent decades, women have made great progress in educational attainment. In particular, there has been a dramatic increase in the participation of women in post-secondary education. Twenty-five years ago, only one in three university students were women. More recently, more than half of those enrolling in Alberta universities are women. This trend is apparent in our public colleges and technical institutes as well.

Over the years, the Government of Alberta has taken steps to ensure that women have equal access to all educational programs, awards and support programs. Challenges must still be met to encourage women into non-traditional fields.

Initiatives

- Alberta Education has introduced **educational policies** that encourage students to consider a wide range of career alternatives. Course curricula are audited to eliminate sex-role stereotyping.
- Alberta Advanced Education makes available a broad range of **degree programs, technology and diploma programs** at the post-secondary level. Of particular importance to women is Athabasca University, a distance education institution. Approximately 62% of enrolments in this university are women.

Women, Training and Career Development

Occupational training programs can provide women with the skills necessary to move into non-traditional jobs, adapt to changing technologies, upgrade their careers, or re-enter the labour force.

Initiatives

- Various **training programs** have been introduced to assist those requiring academic upgrading, skill training or work experience.

- **Financial incentives** are provided either by means of wage subsidies to employers or training allowances to individuals.
- Alberta Career Development and Employment and Alberta Social Services jointly deliver a **work experience program** for social allowance recipients. This program is of particular importance to single mothers and other women who are considering entering or re-entering the workforce.
- The **Women's Career Resource Centre** provides resource materials and workshops designed to familiarize career counsellors and educators with the special educational and employment needs of women.
- The **Women's Program** of the Personnel Administration Office reviews policies and implements programs aimed at enhancing the position of women in the Alberta Public Service. Each Government of Alberta department has assigned two officials to coordinate activities and programs to assist women at the departmental level.

Women in the Labour Force

The last three decades have seen women's participation in the Alberta labour force triple.

Initiatives

- The **Employment Standards Act** provides for minimum standards for employment, working conditions and wages for workers in Alberta. It also provides for unpaid **maternity leave**, guaranteeing eligible employees their previous job or an equivalent assignment on the completion of their leave.
- The **Individual's Rights Protection Act** provides **protection against discrimination** on the basis of sex in several areas including: public notices, services customarily available to the public, tenancy, employment and advertisements for employment. It also allows for **special programs** for women in areas such as education and employment. The **Act** also stipulates that women must receive the **same rate of pay** as men for similar or substantially similar work in the same establishment. Additionally, it ensures that a woman employee is **protected from dismissal** because of pregnancy.

- The **Employment Pension Plans Act** provides for the membership of part-time employees in an employer-sponsored pension plan for full-time employees. Since the majority of part-time workers are women, this will contribute toward their post-retirement income security.
- The importance of **women entrepreneurs** is recognized by the Small Business Division of Alberta Economic Development and Trade, many of whose clients are women. The Alberta Women's Secretariat co-sponsored a Women and Business Conference in 1986.

Women, Health and Social Services

Women, as residents of Alberta, are direct beneficiaries of a comprehensive package of health and social services provided by the Alberta Government.

Initiatives

Income Security

Some income security programs are of special interest to women:

- The **Social Allowance Program** provides financial assistance to people who do not have sufficient resources with which to meet basic needs for themselves and their families. Among the chief beneficiaries of this program are single mothers.
- The **Alberta Assured Income Plan** is a provincial supplement paid to persons 65 years or older receiving the federal Guaranteed Income Supplement to the Old Age Security pension.
- The **Widows' Pension Program** assists widows and widowers aged 55 to 64 years with limited income, by providing financial and health care benefits similar to those received by Alberta senior citizens.

Violence Against Women

The Government of Alberta recognizes the need for information, programs and services that address the serious problem of violence in the home:

- The **Office for the Prevention of Family Violence** provides information and consultation to government, professionals, community groups and the public on the issue of family violence.

- **Women's shelters** are emergency residences which provide temporary shelter for abused women and their children. These shelters, which are located in a number of Alberta communities, receive the majority of their operating funds from the Government of Alberta.

Older Women

The Government of Alberta recognizes the particular needs of the province's senior citizens, the majority of whom are women:

- The **Senior Citizen's Secretariat** gathers and provides information on services, benefits, resource materials and data related to aging and the elderly.
- Elderly Albertans have access to the **Coordinated Home Care Program,** providing them with health and support services.

Community Health

Alberta Community and Occupational Health and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission offer a number of programs and services designed to promote the physical, mental and social well-being of Albertans:

- The **Community Health Nursing Program** offers a number of services of interest to women, including prenatal classes and home visits to all new mothers.
- **Family planning services** are offered through many of the province's health units. In addition, Alberta Community and Occupational Health offers information and technical assistance to the community on family planning matters through a family planning program consultant.
- Women experiencing **drug or alcohol addiction problems** can participate in several programs designed specifically for women which are offered by the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Half of the human energy and talent in Alberta rests with women. The full use of all of our human resources is in the province's best interest.

The progress made in enhancing opportunities for women in Alberta has been considerable. The achievements made to date are indicative of the Government of Alberta's ongoing commitment to women. There is, however, more to be accomplished.

This government intends to pursue its commitment to improve the status of Alberta women through a number of forward-looking strategies. Today, a government-wide plan of action is being developed to provide a framework for the future. New initiatives and programs will focus on education, employment, participation in public life, health and social services. The first phase of this plan — strategies for the education and training of women — will be implemented in 1987.

In the coming years, the Government of Alberta will build on the momentum already developed in achieving the opportunity for full and equal participation of all its citizens.